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ABSTRACT

A national survey was made among those people apt to be influential in promoting appropriate legislation for school food service programs and those who might be involved in decisionmaking about such programs. Questionnaire responses from a wide geographic sample clearly delineate that one major responsibility of school food service members should be to help decisionmakers in local and State positions perceive child nutrition as a public responsibility and as a truly integral part of education. Respondents strongly agreed that school food services should be expanded to teach good eating habits for good health, to provide nutrition education, and to feed the disadvantaged. (MLF)

CHANGING ATTITUDES

by: Josephine Martin, Administrator
School Food Services

A sign on a school superintendent's desk states, "Just because I've been doing things wrong all my life is no sign I should change now." For 25 years in school food service we've been exploiting the paying child, neglecting the poor child and shortchanging all children regarding nutrition education.

Until the events of the sixties described by Mrs. Flanagan, our paradigm for school food service consisted of maintaining the program generally as a food service. It is true that we often told ourselves "school lunch is an integral part of education", "nutrition is important." But for some reason we didn't speak convincingly, or perhaps our paradigm for school food service was narrow and we couldn't perceive the real meanings of the platitudes so easily expressed. Because now in 1971, fewer than 60% of children are having lunch at school, and 21,000 schools have no food service facilities.

The events of the 60's did remove some of the blinders, and broadened our horizons for school food service. The vision of school food service as outlined in HR5291 provides the most comprehensive approach in 25 years to the improvement of school food service, and this vision gives new meaning, greater relevance, and more excitement to our work.

The big question is, when will hope become reality? When will HR5291 become law?

Answers to these questions depend upon how effectively we accept our new level of responsibility and how effectively we accept our new level of stewardship as it relates to feeding the children.

There are three major hurdles to overcome if we are to achieve universal school food service and nutrition education.

1. Passage of the Bill by Congress
2. Funding of the Bill by Congress

Presented to the 25th Annual American School Food Service Association Convention, (Minneapolis, Minnesota, August 1971.)

Universal school food service would require five times as much money as presently budgeted for child nutrition.

The third major hurdle will be the passage of state legislation and appropriations to provide matching funds to implement the bill.

Accepting these three hurdles as challenges will require optimism, courage, dedication, and expertise of school food service personnel. Grassroot efforts must be mustered to gain the necessary support to meet these challenges. Acceptance of a new, a higher level of personnel responsibility is the challenge we give to you today.

As a means of determining the pulse of America regarding universal school food service, the National School Food Service and Nutrition Education Finance Project proceeded to determine the nature and extent of opinions of persons representing leadership positions.

The survey was conducted by Dr. Paul Montello and Dr. Jim Maxey of Georgia State University in Atlanta under the sponsorship of National School Food Service Finance Project and with the assistance of that staff and the Florida and Georgia School Food Service Association.

The survey attempted to answer three questions.

1. Who should receive free school lunch?
2. Who should receive free breakfast?
3. How should school food service be financed?

1,774 questionnaires were mailed to a selected sample of state government officials, professional leaders, officers of state and National Education Association, leaders in business and commerce and special interest groups. People were selected because they represented those likely to be influential in promoting legislation and likely to be involved in decision making about school food service.

This is a preliminary report of the findings as all data has not been analyzed.

1. Over 800 questionnaires, or 45% were returned.
2. Returns represented all geographical areas as well as various groups surveyed.

Findings:

1. Strong agreement that school food service should be expanded.
Strongest agreement came from school food service, other professionals such as educators, special interest groups.
2. Less agreement relative to direction of expansion.
3. Variety of reasons for expansion
 - (a) good health is essential to learning.
 - (b) should provide nutrition education.
 - (c) concentrate on feeding the disadvantaged.

When asked to respond to a series of questions designed to assess why people were for or against expansion, two reasons clearly emerged as major sources for supporting an expanded program.

1. It would expose all students to good food and health habits.
2. It would provide all children with 1/3 of their daily nutritional needs.

The survey indicated:

1. An affidavit should not be required for eligibility.
2. It is difficult for poor children to retain dignity when singled out for free school lunch.
3. Many felt that all children should have free lunches.
4. Majority thought school lunch should be restricted to public schools, however a sizeable minority thought it should be extended to private schools.
5. There is greater support for universal school lunch than breakfast.

Most felt that free breakfast should be available to poor children

6. That a combination of tax sources (federal, state, and local) be used.
7. Federal funds should be available for personnel, facilities, as well as food costs.
8. Little difference in the results from our geographic area to another

The preliminary results of this national attitude survey clearly delineate that one major responsibility of school food service members is to help decision makers in local and state positions to perceive of child nutrition as a public responsibility and a truly integral part of education. The change in attitude is essential to achieving the challenge of state matching for universal school food service.

How do the people in your state and in your community feel about school food service? What is their paradigm?

Copies of the instrument will be distributed to state presidents and state directors this p.m.

Just last week, I heard a nationally recognized school board member say "I'm not really sure all children need school lunch." They need nutrition education, but school lunch is something else." And a prominent college professor of nutrition asked, "Have we really decided that every school needs a school lunch program?" Do you suppose these statements came from your community? The attitude survey in your state will help you pinpoint the groups who need to have their paradigm shattered; their horizons broadened.

Questions such as these from key decision makers, reflect attitudes that must be changed if we are to secure support for universal school food service. Congress has indicated support, but what about state matching? Will state Government provide one billion dollars for universal school food service? That is roughly the amount that will be required.

Now, is the time to begin your local and state campaign for universal school food service and nutrition education. We challenge states to use the instrument developed for the national attitude survey to determine state and local attitudes. Copies of the instrument will be available for state presidents and state school food service directors at the p.m. session.

We have looked at the national survey findings. Now, let's examine the results of the survey made of attitudes of school food service personnel attending this convention. You were asked to respond to four questions.

1. Who should receive free lunches.
2. What should be the tax source for financing free lunches?
3. Who should receive free breakfast.
4. What tax source should be used to finance the breakfast program.

1,450 survey cards were distributed to a random sampling of registrants. 816 or 56% were returned which is a valid sample. Here are the findings:

1. 59% indicated all children regardless of family income should have free school lunch.

2. 26.3% indicated that only children from low income homes should have free lunches.
3. Less than one-half of one percent are opposed to free lunches.
4. 43.2% indicated that a combination of federal, state and local tax monies should be used to finance free lunches.
5. 23.5% indicated that federal funds should be used.
6. Seven people indicated school lunch should be supported from local taxes only.
7. 39.6% indicated that free breakfast should be provided for all children.
8. 27.4% indicated free breakfast should be provided for children from low income homes.
9. 23.7% indicated that no children should have free school breakfast.
10. 32.3% indicated that a combination of funds should be used to finance free school breakfast.
11. Eight people indicated that local taxes should support free breakfast.
12. 22.6% indicated that federal funds should support breakfast.

These findings indicate:

- (1) That the majority of the members do believe in the universal school food service concept financed from a contribution of local state and tax funds.
- (2) Many of our members were not committed to the concept prior to this session. As a result of this session we hope that number has been reduced. However, the findings clearly indicate the need for a campaign by state association to help their members understand and to seek their full support of universal school food service.

Attitude surveys help us to define the dimensions of our task.

During this session you have heard presentations which undoubtedly have raised questions in your mind. Now is the time for you to ask those questions. While I am moving to the microphone down front will you pass your questions to the end of the aisle for the program assistants to collect. This is probably the most important part of the session - the time for you to get your questions answered. If we have unanswered questions at the close of the morning session, they will be considered in the afternoon.

(Seventy five questions were presented and audience discussion followed).

We have not answered all your questions. We hope however that the session has been provocative; that it has caused you to be more excited about and committed to universal school food service and Child Nutrition.

Yesterday as I listened to the speakers talk about the magnificent changes being wrought in our world, and the need we have to convey to youth that their world will not be a new world but an evolving world, the thought occurred to me, "How beautiful it is to have an opportunity to help mold the youth who will help mold the world." Someone has said, "We cannot all do great things, but we can all do small things in a great way." Perhaps we will not be the person that decides how to utilize space for domestic purposes, but you may be the one to nourish the child who makes that discovery.

In closing, I quote from Dr. Lineman:

"Horizons unlimited allow us to see right now for the first time the things as they are. The past is gathered in and our present possibilities are shaking hands with the future of our vision."

Yes, Universal School Food Service and Nutrition Education needs you. Will you make a commitment to follow through on interpreting the need for School Food Service?

500 members attending American School Food Service Association completed follow-through cards indicating the amount of time they were willing to devote to promoting H.R. 5291.

A summary of follow-through cards will be included in another issue of the Journal.